

1002 E

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(U) THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT



BUREAU OF
INTELLIGENCE
AND RESEARCH

ASSESSMENTS
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RESEARCH

(U) In response to requests, INR has prepared the attached CONFIDENTIAL version of its report, "The Afghan Resistance Movement in 1981: Progress, But a Long Way To Go" (Report 310-AR, January 19, 1982).

(C) Since the report was written in late 1981, there have been important changes in Soviet strategy which appear to be having at least a temporary adverse effect on the resistance (mujahidin) movement. The current massive retaliation attacks against key towns and cities that harbor mujahidin may be reducing popular support for the resistance cause. The mujahidin also, reportedly, have been forced recently to relinquish control over some areas in the countryside that they had wrested from government authorities during the last few months.

(C) Wintertime doldrums are not new for the resistance movement. A year ago at this time there were similar warnings of declining morale. With the arrival of spring, however, and a major infusion of new weapons, the resistance movement took off and developed into a much more impressive force than it had been during 1980, the first year of Soviet occupation.

(U) The current resumption of large-scale Soviet offensives, bolstered by more troop augmentations (the Soviet force in Afghanistan is now about 100,000 when at full strength), could, however, lead to a different scenario in 1982. Destruction and suffering in the towns have clearly been raised to new levels this winter, following two long years of debilitating war.

(C) Developments this spring will be crucial. If the mujahidin are able once again to

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March 16, 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

- ii -

acquire a new supply of arms, as they did last year, a repeat of 1981 and a continuing strengthening of the resistance is a real possibility. If not, the decline in morale could be serious, although we expect the mujahidin to continue to put up a good fight.

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(U) The Afghan Resistance Movement in 1981:
Progress, But a Long Way To Go

Summary

(U) In the past year the resistance (mujahidin) movement's military successes have far overshadowed its setbacks. In addition to denying the Babrak regime an opportunity to secure its hold on the country, the resistance has put the regime increasingly on the defensive, brought about a crisis in the Afghan Army, and caused a breakdown in many areas of the economy. Politically, the resistance remains fragmented, but cooperation between mujahidin bands has increased and efforts continue among exile groups to overcome the obstacles to some measure of unity.

(C) Both sides in the Afghan conflict have improved their tactics and capabilities. The result is a continuing standoff, but one in which the initiative currently lies with the resistance, although the Soviets retain the advantage of superior force. The standoff prevails equally in key areas where both the freedom fighters and the Soviet/Afghan forces have concentrated their greatest efforts and in more remote regions, where the Soviet effort is more sporadic but where the mujahidin have had less access to weapons and training.

(U) Neither protagonist has reason to expect that it will achieve its goals soon. Throughout the past year, the Soviets have engaged in numerous military operations both to eliminate mujahidin strongholds and to terrify the civilian population into abandoning support for the resistance. A concurrent political strategy has sought to persuade or bribe the population to accept the regime. Soviet military policy continues to operate against Soviet political policy; neither has achieved any significant success. ::

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Report 310-AR
January 19, 1982

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(C) The resistance has had the edge in terms of accomplishing short-term objectives and has numerous psychological victories to its credit. But its offensive capabilities remain severely limited in the face of superior Soviet firepower. Nevertheless, while the mujahidin do not have the power to force a Soviet retreat, their record last year must have caused the Soviets considerable concern.

(C) Divisiveness continues to be a serious handicap to the resistance movement. Whether the freedom fighters can build on their current position and develop into a more significant threat to the Soviets depends largely on whether they can successfully join forces to become a united movement. Moscow's current assessment is not likely to lead to a major shift of Soviet military policy. It may, however, lead to an amplification and intensification of military pressure and of political efforts to undermine the support base of the resistance and exploit ethnic and tribal differences. For now, mujahidin morale reportedly is high and should serve as a powerful antidote to Soviet/regime political strategy. Furthermore, the trend toward cooperation among mujahidin units inside Afghanistan has been encouraging. It gives reason to hope for greater coordination in the future.

The Resistance: Objectives

(U) Tying the many elements of the Afghan resistance movement together are the twin objectives of forcing the Soviet troops to leave Afghanistan and unseating the puppet Babrak Karmal government. Beyond that there is a wide divergence of aspirations and views concerning the future.

(U) Each of the myriad guerrilla bands engaged in the conflict is motivated by local, tribal, ethnic, and regional priorities. For previously suppressed minority ethnic groups, the struggle provides an opportunity to establish a claim to equal rights and recognition. For most regions, it is an opportunity to establish a degree of autonomy--a traditional goal of Afghan tribes. There is advantage and disadvantage to the multiplicity of motives. Everyone has an incentive to join the battle, but conversely, as separate tribes achieve a degree of autonomy, they may lose their motivation to continue the struggle--i.e., to join a common national effort.

(C) The Soviets and the Babrak regime have tried to exploit tribal susceptibilities. To date, however, their successes have proved temporary; those tribes that have succumbed to Babrak's bribes have later gone back to war. In the past, few Afghans had a sense of nation, but it may be slowly developing now in response to the Soviet occupation.

(U) Leaders of resistance organizations in Peshawar view the conflict somewhat differently from resistance leaders based inside Afghanistan. They have established political parties, some of which cross tribal, ethnic, and regional lines, and they hope to become figures of national importance. Although each of these leaders derives his authority from his Islamic religious credentials, there are major ideological differences among them-- basically, between fundamentalists and more moderate traditionalists.

(U) Translated into specifics, resistance goals lead local mujahidin forces to try to drive government authority out of their area; all symbols of government, civil and military, are targets. Civil targets include government and party offices and officials, numerous state-run economic enterprises, and schools. Military targets are army, militia, and police units. An important related objective is the acquisition of weapons and ammunition (as well as food, fuel, and other necessities) from government and Soviet stocks. This has led to frequent attacks on military supply convoys and to a major struggle for control over transport routes.

(C) The political parties in Peshawar have the additional specific goal of trying to build constituencies inside Afghanistan that will acknowledge their preeminence. This brings Peshawar client bands into conflict with local leadership and with bands affiliated with rival exile leaders. In the ensuing, usually costly, turf fights, the mujahidin often lose sight of the more important overall goals of the resistance movement.

Organization

(C) The resistance is gradually beginning to assume some definable shape, although it still bears a strong resemblance to a patchwork quilt. The conflicting dynamics of tribal and regional-oriented groups inside Afghanistan versus the political parties in Peshawar and the rivalries among the latter lead to constantly shifting constellations.

(C) The hydra-headed nature of the resistance has been frequently cited as an advantage in that there has been no single target for Soviet fire. But a more cohesive effort need not exclude local initiative and widespread activity. It can result in a more concentrated effort against a priority target or, as has been demonstrated in recent months, cooperation for defense of a stronghold. If the resistance is to move beyond its current level, more coordination is essential.

(C) During the past year, there have been some signs of coalescence of the resistance movement inside Afghanistan. Regional tribal associations have been formed, such as those of

Nuristan, the Hazarajat, and the Durranis. First steps have been taken for interregional cooperation among these associations. The impressive Tadzhiik leader in the Panjsher Valley is developing ties with resistance leaders in other areas.

(C) The six major Peshawar political parties, which have been officially recognized by the Government of Pakistan as representatives of the swelling Afghan refugee population, do not appear to have made any significant progress toward unity.^{1/} They continue to compete for political authority in the resistance movement.

(C) Resistance leaders in Afghanistan look to these Peshawar organizations for patronage but in most cases do not feel a strong sense of allegiance to them; mujahidin leaders not only switch patrons but also sometimes accept the support of two organizations at the same time. The fact that the ties of allegiance sit lightly may facilitate cooperation in the field between bands whose Peshawar sponsors are in competition. This kind of local cooperation increased considerably during 1981 with very positive results.

(C) One exception, even in the field, however, has been the forces subordinate to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the exile leader often said to have the most effective organization. Gulbuddin got off to a fast start in the resistance game by virtue of having had an organization already in place in Pakistan when the April 1978 coup sparked the resistance movement. Gulbuddin, however, now is seeing his once preeminent position eroded in a number of areas; consequently, his men have frequently been involved in turf fights with other resistance forces. Coordination between various mujahidin bands during the summer and early fall of 1981 is said

^{1/} (U) These organizations can be split roughly into two groups: the fundamentalists and the moderate-traditionalists. The fundamentalists include: the Hizbi Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; the Hizbi Islami-Khalis faction, led by Mohammad Younus Khalis; the Jamiat-i-Islami-Afghanistan, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani; and the Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami, led by Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. Pir Syed Ahmad Gailani, leader of the Mahaz-i-Milli-Islami, and Pir Sibghatullah Mojadedi, head of the Jabha-i-Majat-i-Milli, are considered to be moderate traditionalists. Efforts to unite the six groups have produced shifting alliances. From March 1980 to March 1981 five of the groups (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar refused to join) belonged to the Islamic Alliance. The Alliance's demise led to a realignment with the two moderates plus Mohammad Nabi in one group and the three remaining fundamentalists in the other. In late 1981 a new alliance of five groups (Alliance of Islamic Freedom Fighters) was announced (this time Syed Ahmad Gailani's organization was left out).

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to have occurred partly in self-defense against Gulbuddin's followers. Publicity in the Western press about the internecine fighting has caused Gulbuddin some concern and has led to efforts by the new Islamic Alliance to settle the disputes.

(C) Another important development inside Afghanistan during the past year has been the emergence of mujahidin leaders who have organizational skills and command respect. In the beginning of the resistance movement, age and hereditary tribal position often dictated the choice of leaders, but now men who have been tested in battle and have demonstrated an aptitude for command are taking over. Prominent examples are Ahmad Shah Masud, the leader of the Panjsher Valley forces, and Major (now "General") Syed Mohammad Jagrand (also called Jaglan) in the Hazarajat.

(C) In Peshawar, the six recognized religious/political parties are still plagued by rivalries, not only among the six but also within the separate organizations. Furthermore, most of these groups are opposed to efforts to unite the resistance movement under the aegis of a countrywide assembly of tribal leaders--a Loya Jirga, the traditional Afghan format for selecting national leadership.

(C) The current conflict between the religious leaders, who dominate the Peshawar organizations, and the secular leaders, who head the regional organizations and support the Loya Jirga concept, reflects a longstanding struggle in Afghanistan between tribal chiefs (the king being the paramount tribal leader) and mullahs--the clergy. Afghan mullahs probably see the present Afghan situation as an opportunity to assert preeminent authority. They are actively involved in support of the Peshawar groups, trying to resolve the bitter disputes among them.

(C) The concept of a Loya Jirga, however, has considerably more potential for giving structure and leadership to the resistance movement than any alliance of the six Peshawar leaders. The latter have been discredited in the eyes of many mujahidin and, in ethnic and tribal terms, represent only a limited Afghan constituency. The first resistance Jirga was held in Peshawar in May 1980, when representatives drawn from all corners of Afghanistan met to lay the groundwork for regional coordination. The dramatic gathering sparked much hope, but opposition from the established Peshawar parties and ineffective leadership of the executive council established by the Jirga turned this into an isolated event.

(C) Later in 1980, however, an effort was launched to build a more solid foundation for a future Jirga by establishing regional tribal alliances, which could eventually coalesce into a national assembly. In March 1981, meetings were held in Peshawar

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under the sponsorship of already-formed regional associations, to promote similar associations in other parts of the country. The number of regional associations has subsequently grown, but their authority has remained limited.

(U) One of the most nettlesome unresolved questions related to the Loya Jirga idea is whether former King Zahir should be urged to participate in and to assume leadership of the resistance movement. Many Afghans believe that only the King can provide a true symbol of unity. But some fundamentalists are staunchly opposed to his return. Zahir has said that he would respond to an irresistible call from all involved parties, but that is not likely to be forthcoming in the foreseeable future.

(C) In September 1981, a Jirga was held in Quetta, Pakistan, sponsored by Pushtun and Baluch tribal leaders of southern and western Afghanistan who jumped the gun and issued a call for the King. The move was probably unwelcome to other regional leaders who would prefer to establish quietly a comprehensive system of tribal alliances without provoking opposition from the fundamentalists by publicly associating the King with this effort. Has

Nevertheless, it probably served a limited useful purpose as a regional gathering of resistance representatives from southern and western Afghanistan. But by denouncing and being denounced by the Peshawar groups, it also highlighted the deep divisions in the resistance movement.

(C) One last component of the resistance which should be mentioned is the exile community of prominent Afghans, now living in Europe and the United States. The most notable exile is former Prime Minister Yousuf; another is former Deputy Prime Minister Samad Hamid. Some of these men have been playing an active role in resistance politics but have not, as yet, had a major impact.

Achievements in 1981

(U) Foreign observers, who returned in 1981 as guests of the mujahidin to areas of Afghanistan they had visited the year before, were struck by the extent to which the resistance had expanded the territory under its control. In the intervening year, government officials and security forces had abandoned many outlying districts to the mujahidin. By mid-1981, the guerrillas and their foreign guests were able to travel at will and during daylight hours for long distances and through numerous small towns and villages without fear of detection, even in provinces that border Pakistan and are therefore particularly important to Soviet defense strategy.

- 7 -
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(U) In the 75 percent of the country where the resistance exercises de facto control, resistance leaders have set up their own administration, making laws, collecting taxes, dispensing justice, and providing services. Even in areas where there is nominal government authority (maintained by a military presence), the resistance often runs parallel governments. In the cities of Qandahar and Herat, for example, the mujahidin dictate curfew hours, establish price controls, and levy taxes. In almost all areas the dividing line between government and resistance authority will be still more clearly drawn at the edge of an important town, with the mujahidin controlling traffic, manning roadblocks, and levying duties just beyond this line. This is the currently prevailing situation just outside Kabul. Frequently, local civilian and military authorities buy a tenuous peace from the mujahidin by supplying them with weapons and ammunition.

(U) During the course of 1981, the resistance demonstrated an impressive capability for bringing the war to major cities. The freedom fighters "held" Qandahar for much of the summer and early fall; they kept Herat in periodic turmoil; and even in Kabul, nightly gun battles, frequent assassinations, and intensifying attacks on government and Soviet installations attested to a significant mujahidin presence in spite of tight security and repeated house-to-house search operations.

(C) The resistance also, throughout the year, demonstrated a growing capability to interfere with the Soviet/Afghan supply system. Refined tactics and better weapons brought disaster to numerous convoys on all major routes, including the vital link between the Soviet border and Kabul. The regime has been forced to rely increasingly on air transport to supply not only isolated military posts, but also garrisons in a growing number of provincial capitals.

(U) Among the most impressive achievements of the mujahidin last year were successful defensive operations against major Soviet offensives. These included the well-publicized defense of the strategically located (northeast of Kabul) Panjsher Valley in September, the successful turning back of two efforts to take Younus Khalis' base in Nangarhar Province, and the mujahidin's ability to maintain a stronghold in Paghman just 12 miles from Kabul in spite of persistent efforts to dislodge them.

Sources of Strength

(U) The preeminent source of strength for the resistance movement is the support it receives from the Afghan people, regardless of ethnic group or tribal affiliation. That the Soviets recognize the overwhelming nature of this support is evident from the tremendous effort they have put into political

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and propaganda work to discredit the mujahidin and make the regime's policies attractive.

(U) Particularly beneficial aspects of the general popular support are the critical breakdown in the recruitment system for the Afghan armed forces and the widespread collusion between the mujahidin and the military establishment. In September 1981, anticipating that perhaps two-thirds of currently serving enlisted men (estimated at a total of around 30,000) were due for discharge in December, the government announced a mobilization of almost all reservists up to age 35. The call-up provoked an extremely negative reaction and the regime backtracked quickly, establishing numerous categories of exemptions. Original estimates of eligible reservists reportedly were lowered from 450,000 to 85,000. The results of the call-up continue to be disappointing; it is unlikely to produce more than 15,000-20,000 able-bodied men, many of whom will desert as quickly as possible.

(U) The government would have preferred not to discharge any currently serving men, not only because it needs them, but also because of the danger of making such a large pool of trained soldiers available to the mujahidin. The discharge was announced, however, on December 4, probably because the regime dared not run the risk of the explosive reaction which could have followed a further extension of service. But every effort is being made to ensure that those who are officially discharged actually remain in the army or related security services.

(U) Soviet policy rests on having the Afghan Army spearhead the anti-guerrilla fighting and on eventually turning the prosecution of the war over to the Afghans. There appears to be no possibility of realizing this goal in any foreseeable future.

(C) Collusion between the mujahidin and the security forces is a major asset for the resistance. Successful guerrilla raids on police and military arms depots are frequently the result of "inside" assistance, and intelligence provided to the mujahidin by military officers is indispensable.

(C) Perhaps the most significant factor in the improvement in mujahidin capabilities has been the increasing cooperation among resistance bands in the field, which in turn has led to more sophisticated military strategy. In a growing number of instances, including the campaigns in the Panjsher and at Paghman, mujahidin from outside the immediate battle zone have contributed their services. Coordination between bands has led to flanking and rear-action tactics with effective results.

(C) The impressive mujahidin record of 1981 is also due to an improved weapons position. Outside help has contributed but,

- 9 -
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according to foreign visitors during the year. has been greatly exaggerated in the media. The guerrillas continue to acquire most of their weapons and ammunition through their own efforts, largely by attacking military installations and supply convoys. Arms and particularly ammunition shortages can develop quickly, however, and resupply can be delayed and difficult.

(C) In many parts of the country the mujahidin are still seriously underarmed in relation to the potential fighting force. The arms question is basic to mujahidin morale. Without arms they are discouraged; with them, they seem prepared to endure inordinate hardship indefinitely.

Weaknesses and Failures

(U) Although the resistance movement has clearly been growing stronger and more effective, the limits of its capabilities are still pronounced. The mujahidin can turn back a major Soviet offensive into the Panjsher Valley, but they cannot mount a similar offensive against a Soviet stronghold. They can virtually control life inside the city of Qandahar, but they cannot drive the Soviet military forces away from the Soviet base on the outskirts or prevent them from bombarding the city and eventually sending in their troops. They can control entire provinces in the Hazarajat, but they cannot prevent a token Soviet military presence in this remote area which enables the regime to fly the flag in the provincial capitals. If the mujahidin push too far, if they threaten to banish all symbols of Kabul's authority, they and the local civilian population inevitably will be subjected to ruthless retaliation.

(U) The guerrilla fighters have successfully defended mountain strongholds, but they cannot defend villages and towns along main roads which serve as a base for ambush operations against convoys. Nor can they protect the civilian populations in and near provincial and district capitals that are being fought over. Many of these villages and towns have been subjected to frequent aerial bombardment and to periodic search and destroy missions, which are also intended to round up recruits for the military.

(U) As the mujahidin have extended their control, more and more of the country has returned to relative normalcy, a fact that has impressed recent visitors. In other areas, however, particularly those close to Kabul, other major cities, main roads, and resistance strongholds, Soviet forces are attacking with increasing intensity. Recently, military forces have begun to clear away buildings and trees, which have served as protective cover for the mujahidin, in a wide swath along the roads running north and south from Kabul.

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(U) Some writers have suggested that because of the exodus of refugees fleeing from the war, freedom fighters will no longer be able to be "lost" in the the general population. This may be a problem in provinces adjacent to Pakistan and Iran, which have seen the greatest loss of inhabitants. In other areas, however, a substantial proportion of the population has remained in the villages.

(C) Charges that the Soviets are deliberately trying to empty the country of the civilian population do not seem to be well founded. The Babrak regime and the Soviets are trying to exploit the refugees as a potentially destabilizing element in Pakistan, but are aware that the enormous refugee population emphasizes the illegitimacy of the Babrak regime. They and the government are trying hard to entice the refugees to return.

(C) Apart from the obvious disparity in its weapons position vis-a-vis the Soviets, the most debilitating weakness of the resistance is its lack of unity. Skeptics doubt that such a divided people can ever achieve the centralized direction necessary to raise the resistance threat beyond its present level. Certainly, the record of the political organizations in Peshawar, supports this thesis, as does the fact that there has been no reconciliation between the political organizations as a group and those who propose a Loya Jirga approach.

(U) The Soviets are aware of this basic weakness and are making every effort to exploit it by appealing to regional, ethnic, tribal, and religious aspirations in order to gain support for the regime. The reorganization of the old Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs into the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs, together with the appearance of newspapers and radio programs in regional languages, indicates the thrust of this policy. So does the creation of a special department for religious affairs in the Prime Ministry.

(C) The regime has also used monetary bribes to gain the support of key tribes and special interest groups and has reverted to the traditional practice of exempting certain tribes along the border from military conscription in return for their role in guarding the border routes. In August 1981, the government announced new land reform regulations which, in effect, offer exemption from land confiscation in return for supporting the Babrak regime. None of these measures has proved particularly effective. Incentives to escape land confiscation are meaningless in areas where the government lacks sufficient authority to impose a land reform program. ~~Border tribes are notoriously fickle;~~ recently several which had previously appeared to have been bought off by the regime resumed an active role in the resistance.

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(U) The failure of these efforts and of the National Fatherland Front, which as the cornerstone of Soviet/regime political policy was designed to legitimize the Babrak regime, demonstrates that the Soviets and Babrak have been unable, to date, to turn the fragmented nature of the resistance to their advantage.

The Future

(C) Statements by Afghan leaders and a growing number of articles in the Soviet press signify that the Babrak regime and the Soviets are sensitive about the increasing strength of the resistance movement. The protracted stay in Kabul in late 1981 of a high-level military delegation led by First Deputy Defense Minister Sokolov, together with an end-of-the-year augmentation of 5,000 troops and an intensification of offensive operations, indicated that the Soviet military authorities in Afghanistan were under pressure to produce results against the resistance. Although the possibility that the Soviets will significantly increase their forces cannot be ruled out, it seems more likely that any further increases will also be moderate and that Moscow will follow its previous practice of trying to improve military tactics and concentrating on political strategy.

(C) Soviet military strategy during 1981 included: efforts to increase mobility through the use of commando parachute units, ambush operations to intercept mujahidin in transit, and the use of chemical agents against guerrillas in caves and other inaccessible spots. A major focus of attention was on making maximum use of Afghan forces and preventing them from deserting or defecting when under fire. To this end, the Soviets usually deploy Afghan troops in front of the accompanying Soviet forces.

(C) Soviet options for stage-managing a satisfactory internal political solution are severely circumscribed. Developments during autumn 1981, including Prime Minister Keshtmand's prolonged (10-week) stay in Moscow, and renewed maneuvering by the Khalqi faction gave rise to speculation about impending political changes. Subsequent developments, however, particularly the publicity attending Babrak's presentation of the Afghan Sun of Freedom Order to Brezhnev and his state visit to Bulgaria (both in December) suggest the Soviets are not prepared to make radical changes at this time. In any event, Soviet concern about the political aspects of the Afghan problem--internal and international--should continue to militate against any rapid large-scale increase of Soviet troops, although gradual increments are a viable option.

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(C) Nor are the Pakistanis likely to alter radically their policies or to abandon their moral support for the resistance.

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(C) The Iranians are also likely to continue to condemn the Soviet occupation and to back the mujahidin, particularly those of the Shiite sect. The recent Iranian peace plan suggests that the Iranians see the Afghan situation as an opportunity to export their own brand of revolutionary Islam.

(C) If the above assumptions that there will not be any major changes in the policies of the Soviet Union, Pakistan, or Iran are correct, then it follows that the most important factor determining the next stages of the resistance is its own ability to unite its many separate elements into a cohesive movement. To date the mujahidin have done remarkably well in spite of the prevailing anarchy within the movement. The improved performance during 1981 clearly demonstrates, however, that coordination among fighting groups can significantly increase their effectiveness. An important beginning has been made on the local level. The question is whether it can progress to broader alliances encompassing more territory and eventually to a national organization.

(C) This is not to suggest that a united resistance could physically force the Soviets out of Afghanistan. But it could make their position there considerably more difficult to maintain, raising the question of relative costs versus gains. The current Soviet program of educating and training several thousand young Afghans per year in the Soviet Union clearly indicates that Moscow is taking a long-range view. But as the Soviets look into the future, they may see that their long-term political interests in Afghanistan will be damaged by a protracted and bitter war. If, however, they continue to see a fragmented resistance, they will continue to anticipate a favorable conclusion to their present difficulties.

(C) Responsible Afghans, including prominent leaders in previous governments, are aware of the need to forge unity,

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It remains to be seen whether the inspiration of Islam and the xenophobic dislike of the Soviets are a strong enough combination to overcome Afghanistan's long history of tribal and ethnic separatism.

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